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## POSSIBILITIES IN A READING LESSON

How shall we conduct the reading lesson assigned to be prepared at home?

The prevailing reading method pursued day after day in many, many classrooms is simple enough but it does not answer this question satisfactorily. The instructor begins with:

"What pages have we for to-day? Eighty-five and eighty-six? Thank you. Mr. Williams you may begin."

Mr. Williams tries the usual subterfuge of translating without reading. He knows why. He reads abominably; the instructor has paid very little attention to that phase of the lesson and the class—none at all, because the translation of the next paragraph after all, is the matter of vital importance. Why pay attention anyway to Williams' agonizing struggles with foreign sounds, syllables and words? Of what interest are his painful exertions with his own elusive native language? The class knows, for it has been so from time immemorial, that the next paragraph will *be* translated into English. Someone is to be called upon in three or four minutes and that someone must be ready. The wearied teacher (has she not listened to the translation of this story at least ten times?) would like to dispense with Mr. Williams' reading in the foreign tongue, but duty and conscience tell her that modern methods demand that a little French be heard in the French classroom. Williams painfully begins his reading and after many interruptions, corrections and reprimands, he is told to sit down. "He is stupid and inattentive and will never learn French anyway." Poor Williams inwardly vows that he will never prepare his lesson again.

The teacher's intention had been to have complete paragraphs read aloud as a drill in expression, phrasing and pronunciation, but time flies. Several pupils read a sentence and translate a paragraph. More struggles with foreign and mother tongues. The period is half over but the lesson is not half finished. Re-assuring her conscience with the thought that after all, she is preparing her pupils for examination, the teacher says (with a concealed sigh of relief): "You may translate into English without reading the French." She comfortably sits back in her chair,

for it is all smooth sailing ahead. . . . Mr. Henry translates, *Va-t-en, va-t-en, il cria à tue-tête* by, "Go to it, go to it, he cried to the cut-throat;" *Le lendemain, il a fait l'école buissonnière*, by "The next day he went to business school;" *Elle croyait qu'il allait pleuvoir à verse* by "She thought that he was going to weep poetically."

But the bell sounds! Pages eighty-seven and eighty-eight are assigned for the next day. The French lesson is over! Or rather the curtain has fallen on a translation *travesty*. The class passes to the next recitation and leaves France and the French language far behind. France and the French language? Has the class been in contact with a living country and a living language? Can the pupils draw any inspiration from this soulless operation of changing one language into terms of another? Will they set to work with interest and enthusiasm to prepare the next day's assignment? What has been the aim?

The *aim* of every reading lesson should be fourfold:

- (a) to increase the foreign vocabulary.
- (b) to train with equal emphasis the ear, the eye and the tongue.
- (c) to emphasize a few essential points in grammar.
- (d) to make the pupils realize that they are studying the living language of a living race whose thoughts, impulses, deeds and ambitions may be a lesson to the American youth.

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What then shall be done with the reading lesson? The possibilities are limitless. A few practical ideas will be suggested; the resourceful teacher will develop these into many more interesting and valuable devices.

1. Translation into English should be reduced to a minimum. If, however, examinations continue to demand translation into English, let the teacher occasionally read aloud to the pupils (whose books will be closed) and from time to time select one to translate the sentence read. Or, a pupil may read aloud and be permitted to select the pupils who are to translate from his reading. It is needless to say that translation phrase by phrase is neither a good test of preparation, nor of ear-training, nor is it a test of the pupils' appreciation of the foreign tongue. Complete sentences should be read and translated. In schools that prepare for college entrance or state examinations, it is well

four or five times a semester, to call for written translation into English to be done at home. In this work a most serious and painstaking effort must be made by the teacher as well as by the class. The teacher will immediately discover those pupils who have difficulty in expressing foreign thoughts and idioms in good English. These should be made to repeat this kind of work until they realize that languages are too far apart to allow of a word for word rendering. The pupil who translates into good English the first time, will, under ordinary circumstances, always do so and he ought not to be burdened with this type of work. The correction of these translation papers should not form part of the recitation and when returned they ought often to be used for re-translation.

2. In addition to the regular assignment to the entire class, much time can be saved once in a while by selecting three pupils for special work. One is to prepare a list of the difficult words in the lesson, another a list of idioms and the third, a list of difficult sentences. The next day they are the pupil-teachers who call upon their classmates for the translation of the difficulties. This review should be quick and even if the lists are exhausted twice, there will be time for other work during the period. From time to time, it will be found helpful to ask the entire class to hand in their list of difficulties.

3. It happens seldom that the teacher's French or German is heard in the classroom for anything except isolated words, corrections and questions. And yet we expect the pupils to read correctly and expressively. It is well, therefore, from time to time, to devote the whole period to the teacher's reading. In that way and in that way alone can the class be made to appreciate the rhythm of a French sentence or the place of the tonic and the expressive accent. It does not require very much ability on the part of the teacher to discover whether the meaning of the story read is clear or not. Of course books are closed and flagging attention may be changed to general, sustained interest by calling upon pupils to repeat whole sentences. This repetition is an exceedingly valuable exercise especially in the early part of the course.

4. In order further to emphasize pronunciation, phrasing and accent, it will be found useful to assign a paragraph to each pupil for special preparation in addition to the customary assignment.

It goes without saying that each pupil ought to be ready to read any part of the lesson but practise has shown that the results are much more encouraging when special effort is called for. If the pupils are asked, in addition, to memorize the most beautiful line or passage in the lesson or that line or passage which appeals to them most, the recitation will be an invaluable exercise in clear and forceful reading.

5. Questions and answers on the text should be the most general method. There should be a generous mingling of *where* and *when* questions calling for facts and *why* questions calling for thought. No opportunity should be lost for emphasizing grammar points in the text. This question and answer method means a continuous and rapid fire of clear and challenging questions by the teacher—never tiresome and always stimulating to the class that has prepared its work—in which facts must be called for, thought provoked and grammar applied. We too often forget that questions on a text may be made the questions, the conversation of every day life and that every sentence is a storehouse of applied grammar.

6. A shorter reading assignment may sometimes be given and the pupils asked to write out twenty or twenty-five questions on the prepared text, questions which must cover the essential points of the lesson. These questions are read by the pupils the following day and with books closed they are answered by their classmates. There will be a great variety of questions which will easily cover the whole lesson. Active participation in the lesson on the part of the pupils necessarily accompanies such a method and eager spontaneous interest cannot fail to prevail.

7. An excellent drill on question-forms may be given in connection with the reading lesson as follows: Assign a two-page lesson from which ten topic-sentences have been selected. Each pupil is given one sentence. He is to write out as many questions as he can frame on the assigned sentence. Competition is always keen. He will wish to outdo the classmates who have the same sentence and if possible hand in more questions than anyone else in the class. The answers to these questions must be given orally during the recitation and as the pupils themselves will conduct the work, the teacher will simplify and correct ambiguous or confusing questions. The preparation of such a lesson requires

on the part of the pupil, ample knowledge of the subject-matter connected with the assigned sentence. The direction of such a recitation requires, on the part of the teacher, patient, encouraging and suggestive criticism.

8. Outlines of the prepared lesson in the foreign tongue may be demanded, especially in third and fourth year classes. In studying plays, outlines of scenes and acts, handed in as the reading progresses will form an interesting story of the whole play. Such a notebook will not only give the resourceful teacher an opportunity to call for illustrative material but will also be an invaluable aid for discussion and review.

9. The class must always be prepared to give the substance of a short passage read aloud. Too much must not be expected in the early stages of the work. The teacher's encouragement is most needed in this type of a recitation. A written exercise may be combined with this lesson by sending the pupil, who has just read, to the board to write the substance of his passage while the next pupil reads. When five or six themes have been written at the board, themes which cover the day's assignment, their correction will be an interesting review of story and vocabulary.

10. An additional exercise of this kind—an exercise which brings in the element of ear-training—might well be turned to good account. Especially would this be of permanent value in the first year when timidity must be overcome not only by encouragement but by instilling in the pupils a feeling of power and achievement. This scheme requires the pupils, with books closed, to give the substance of two, three or four sentences read by the teacher. The ability to grasp a thought uttered in a foreign language and to reproduce it in that language, is worthy of careful training.

11. This brings us to the question of complete oral reports of the lesson studied. This exercise, so often put off to the third and fourth year, should be in general use from the very beginning. The power to tell a story in the foreign tongue must be developed slowly and intelligently. It is well in the early years to expect only two or three pupils to make special preparation for such reports. No great mistake has been committed if at first they are allowed to glance at the open book when telling the story, then a few helpful notes on a slip of paper may be permitted,

until finally the pupil is able to stand squarely on both feet and make the report without interruption or assistance. A modification of this plan is the progressive story-telling recitation in which the first pupil begins the story of the lesson and the others are expected to take up the theme whenever the teacher sees fit to interrupt the story-teller.

12. One of our aims is to increase the foreign language vocabulary. From time to time this may be done by carefully selecting thirty or forty important words in the lesson—words that will cover the main points of the story—and calling for sentences containing those words in class. Only those sentences must be accepted that bring out the salient ideas of the lesson. The ability to do this undoubtedly indicates thorough preparation on the part of the pupil.

13. Vocabulary building may be varied by writing on the board a list of twenty or thirty of the important nouns, verbs and idioms of the assigned lesson. The pupils then are required to write a résumé of the lesson prepared at home using the suggested words on the board. These compositions must be short because a few must be read in class and corrected.

14. A purely grammatical study of the reading lesson ought to form part of the regular work. At least once a fortnight a serious effort ought to be made to emphasize grammar by means of the reading text. This must not be an attempt to bring out every grammatical point as it is reached. To treat every word in the sentence as a challenge to our grammatical understanding is confusing, uninspiring and valueless. Two or three points at a time—for instance the agreement of the past participle and the present participle in French—can be made the object of an interesting hunt in the field of grammar. Then grammar becomes a living tool, indispensable for the complete appreciation of the foreign tongue.

15. Re-shaping is a useful combination of grammar study and oral reading. This means the reading of a paragraph of the prepared lesson with necessary changes. The following are a few suggestions for the French lesson:

- (a) Mettez tous les noms au pluriel.
- (b) Mettez tous les noms au singulier.

(c) Donnez au paragraphe suivant la forme interrogative. La forme négative.

(d) Mettez les verbes de ce paragraphe au passé indéfini.

(e) Changez la phrase suivante, de manière que le participe présent soit employé comme adjectif verbal.

(f) Remplacez les noms de la phrase suivante par des pronoms (For example: *le soldat remet l'épée à l'officier* is to be changed to *Il le lui remet*, etc., etc.)

16. The missing word method is not a childish game but requires on the contrary careful preparation. A typewritten or mimeographed set of sentences, about thirty in number, is needed with at least fifty dashes for missing words. The sentences are of course taken from the assigned reading lesson. Care must be exercised to frame the directions in such a way that guessing will be discouraged. The following suggestions may be helpful:

(a) Complétez les phrases suivantes. (For example, *Il ira la voir pour que—*)

(b) Remplacez les points par le contraire des mots en italique. (Ce garçon est  *paresseux* , l'autre est. . . .)

(c) Remplacez les tirets par des adjectifs possessifs ou des pronoms possessifs.

(d) Complétez ces questions. (*— faisait-il?*)

(e) Mettez la préposition convenable à la place du tiret, etc., etc.

17. Dictation should often form part of the reading lesson. In the first year, the exact sentences as they appear in the lesson studied at home should be the subject of dictation. Later it is an excellent scheme to cover the whole lesson by dictating a résumé (prepared by the teacher) of the reading assigned. This résumé should follow the text closely at first. Questions on the text may be dictated to the class during the first half of the period and the last half devoted to answering the questions on paper. This is a dictation and composition exercise, always interesting and stimulating.

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Many more suggestions might be made. Let these suffice to show that translation into English must be reduced to a minimum and that when examinations cease to call for translation, this antiquated and valueless method must be banished from the



classroom. Then will the language of the recitation be the language studied, the living language of a living country, the language of a glorious people, the language of a country that has been guided by great principles and great men, the language of a race that has achieved and is achieving a vital work in its allotted place in the great structure of human society, the language of a nation that will teach our American youth that there are *world wide* ideals of service, efficiency, honor and duty.

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